DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 900 CG 025 162

AUTHOR Vail, Ann; Nest, Judy
TITLE Dare To Be You: A Diversion Program for First Time Juvenile Offenders.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Children; Communication Skills; Coping; *Correctional Rehabilitation; *Crime; *Decision Making; *Delinquency; Interpersonal Competence; Peer Influence; *Self Esteem; Stress Management

ABSTRACT

This document notes that community-based organizations such as the Cooperative Extension Service have joined the efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency through juvenile diversion programs. It then describes the "Dare to be You" program that was developed by the Colorado Cooperative Extension System. The six objectives of the program delineated in this report are to help adolescent participants: (1) improve their self-esteem and self-concept; (2) adopt techniques for managing their stress level and coping with peer pressure; (3) improve skills for communicating with family and friends; (4) improve reasoning and decision-making skills; (5) become more knowledgeable about the effects of self-destructive behavior on their lives and adopt alternative behaviors; and (6) accept responsibility for their own decisions and learn to make choices that have a positive impact on their lives. The implementation of the "Dare to be You" program with first-time juvenile offenders in Latah County, Idaho is described and the impact of the program since its initiation in 1991 is reviewed. The document concludes that the "Dare to be You" program shows great promise as a diversion program for first-time juvenile offenders that can keep vulnerable youth from entering the formal juvenile justice system. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 365 900

DARE TO BE YOU

A DIVERSION PROGRAM FOR FIRST TIME JUVENILE OFFENDERS

Ann Vail, Ph.D., C.H.E.
Assistant Professor
School of Home Economics
College of Agriculture
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83843
208-885-7819

Judy Nest, M.S.
Associate Extension Professor/Extension Home Economist
University of Idaho College of Agriculture
Latah County Extension Office
Latah County Courthouse
P.O. Box 8068
Moscow, Idaho 83843
208-883-2267

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG025162

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Vail

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Background

In looking at today's juvenile delinquents, one finds it easy to reduce many of them to a statistical number; however, continued belief that the future lies in all children fuels the need to discover better ways to deal with those that engage in less than acceptable behaviors. Traditionally, society depends upon law enforcement agencies to carry out this function. Recently, other community-based organizations, including the Cooperative Extension System, have joined the efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency through juvenile diversion programs.

Diversion is the process of limiting the amount of involvement a juvenile has with the formal organization and procedures of the juvenile justice systems. Initially, the purpose of the development of the juvenile court was to divert juveniles from the adult criminal justice system. Ironically, in the 1960's, the diversion of juveniles from formal processing within the juvenile justice system became a prominent goal of juvenile justice. Each year, over 6,000 Idaho juveniles are arrested for crimes they commit. In response to this finding, the Idaho State 4-H Office took steps to identify and implement a successful prevention training program for first time juvenile offenders.

The *Dare to be You* program, developed by the Colorado Cooperative Extension System, has proven effective in impacting problem behaviors of adolescents. The objectives of the program are to help participants: 1)improve their self-esteem and self-concept; 2)adopt techniques for managing their stress level and coping with peer pressure; 3)improve skills for communicating with family and friends; 4)improve reasoning and decision-making skills; 5)become more knowledgeable about the effects of self-destructive behavior on their lives and adopt alternative behaviors; and 6)accept responsibility for their own decisions and learn to make choices that have a positive impact on their lives. Grants were secured from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to conduct the *Dare to be You* program for first-time offenders in Latah County.

Implementation of the Program

The target population for Latah County program is first-time juvenile offenders. Youth are identified and recommended for referral into the program by probation officers in the Latah County Youth Services Department. The recommendations are reviewed by either a judge or the Youth Accountability Board. Age of offender, seriousness of offense, and individual maturity are possible reasons for selection. When selected, youth are mandated to participate in *Dare to be You*. The targeted youth are between 11 and 15 years of age and have committed a minor crime, such as petty theft. Youth referred to the program are often less sophisticated than their peers; therefore, they are viewed by their probation officers and counselors as being more likely to learn and adopt the skills taught in *Dare to be You*.

The *Dare to be You* program for juvenile offenders is a 20 hour program held over a six-week period. Topics include self-esteem, communication and peer pressure, self-responsibility, and decision-making. Activities used to communicate these concepts include role plays, discussions, problem solving, and games. Youth are assessed using the "What I Am Like" instrument to identify changes in self-perception; "Why Things Happen" instrument to identify locus of control; and pre-and post-skill inventories to measure progress in personal skill development. Assessment occurs prior to beginning the program and six weeks after completion.

Each session begins with an orientation meeting for youth and their parents. The program is explained and expectations are discussed. Prior to the last session, parents are invited to participate in a family skill-building activity with their child. Parenting styles are explained and activities, based on requests from the youth, are included in the session.

A modification was made to the *Dare to be You* program as a result of negative behaviors which emerged in the first session. Participants exhibited negative behaviors which resulted in a class that was behaviorally out of control--actually, the juvenile

offenders ended up taking over the class. Changes were initiated to incorporate positive peer role models in the class. Non-offenders in the same age group who had positive self-esteem and who had good communication and leadership skills were invited to participate in the second session. These youth, primarily recruited from the local 4-H and scouting programs, proved to have a positive effect on classroom behavior and management.

Although self-esteem is emphasized throughout the program, the last class serves as a tool to reinforce this concept even more. All participants receive a *Dare to be You* T-shirt and a certificate which recognizes a participant's positive personality trait, characteristic, or behavior. An appropriate recreational activity suggested and demonstrated by participants concludes the program.

Impact

Since 1991, 79 youth have participated in the program, 68 first-time juvenile offenders and 11 positive peer role models. This included 55 males and 24 females between the ages of 8 and 16 who were referred to *Dare to be You* by the Latah County Youth Services Department. Forty-four of the youth committed a petty theft, 18 committed a serious theft, and 6 committed a crime against a person. Grade levels ranged from 3rd to 10th grade with the majority being in the 8th grade.

Data analysis shows an increase in raw scores for self-perception, locus of control, and personal skill development. Differences in test scores have not been statistically significant; however, program leaders believe there are two possible explanations. First, a six week program is a short time to bring about significant changes in self-concept or locus of control which have formed over a lifetime. Second, performance could be attributed to difficulty in understanding the instruments. The reading level required is much higher than that possessed by most participants; therefore, instruments have been extensively modified. Data using these modified instruments are currently being collected.

Parents and teachers indicated improved behavior and academic achievement for some of the *Dare to be You* participants. Several of the juvenile offenders have developed new and more positive friendships with their peers while others have expanded their circle of friends to include the positive peer role models.

One teen had the courage and self-esteem to try out for the football team; he made it! While first-time offenders are required to meet with their probation officer on a regular basis, they voluntarily visit the *Dare to be You* trainer in her office or home to say hello, to report that they are staying out of trouble, and to share some of the things happening in their lives.

Not only has the program affected the youth involved, in some cases, it has had a positive effect on the parents. To improve their parenting skills and learn some of the communication techniques their children learned in *Dare to be You*, several parents enrolled in an Active Parenting of Teens class offered by the extension staff. The Latah County Youth Services Department and the Department of Health and Welfare also view the program as successful. Yearly funding has been secured for conducting the *Dare to be You* program since its inception in 1991. Currently, the twelfth session is in progress.

Implications

With increased emphasis on serving at-risk populations, extension educators are being asked to develop programs for non-traditional audiences. First time juvenile offenders are not traditionally served through extension programming. This article describes an existing program used for a unique group of adolescents. *Dare to be You* shows great promise as a diversion program for first time juvenile offenders thereby keeping vulnerable youth from entering the formal juvenile justice system. In striving to meet the needs of our communities, extension educators must continue to modify current programs to serve youth who have often been left for others to serve.